



U.S. Immigration
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Enforcement

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News Release

ICE'S NATIONAL GANG CRACKDOWN REACHES 155 ARRESTS

In just 7 weeks, Operation Community Shield yields key results in 19 U.S. Cities

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- In testimony before Congress today, Michael J. Garcia, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), announced that a national anti-gang initiative launched by ICE Feb. 23 has resulted in the arrest of more than 155 members of the violent street gang Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) in 19 U.S. cities.

At a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, Assistant Secretary Garcia provided lawmakers with the latest results of "Operation Community Shield," a nationwide ICE initiative to disrupt, dismantle, and prosecute violent gang members by employing the full range of authorities and investigative tools available to ICE.

"This operation is just the beginning in our fight to defeat violent street gangs," Garcia told lawmakers. "Operation Community Shield is an important public safety initiative for the Department of Homeland Security that targets the proliferation of gang violence throughout the country. By bringing the full range of ICE's immigration and customs authorities in the fight against violent street gangs, we can take hundreds of gang members off the streets and have a significant impact on community safety."

Garcia said that all 155 of the gang members apprehended thus far under Operation Community Shield have been arrested for immigration violations, both criminal and administrative. More than half of those arrested have violent criminal histories with arrests and convictions for crimes such as robbery, assault, rape and murder. Nine of those arrested have been identified as MS-13 leaders.

Garcia further stated that 22 of the arrested gang members have been charged with criminal violations for illegal re-entry after deportation and are subject to up to 20 years in federal prison, depending on their criminal history. For example, ICE agents in Los Angeles arrested four MS-13 gang members who illegally re-entered the United States, all with prior convictions for violent crimes ranging from brandishing a firearm to witness tampering.

In describing the results of the anti-gang initiative, Garcia highlighted the dramatic increase in the number and size of transnational street gangs, such as MS-13, in the United States. "These gangs have a significant, often a majority, foreign-born membership and are frequently involved in human and contraband smuggling, immigration violations and other crimes with a nexus to the border. Like any street gang, these gangs also have a propensity toward violence," he said.

While all the arrests to date have involved immigration violations, ICE agents are also investigating financial crimes and smuggling violations committed by gang members. "By combining immigration enforcement authorities with expertise in financial investigations, we have an additional tool to hit these criminal gangs where it hurts--by going after their money," Garcia said.

For example, Garcia highlighted an ongoing ICE investigation of a street gang known to transport large quantities of narcotics into the United States from Mexico. ICE agents are using electronic surveillance and identifying illicit proceeds for forfeiture as they pursue federal money laundering and drug smuggling charges against the gang members.

Under Operation Community Shield, ICE has also taken several new steps to help other federal, state, and local agencies identify and target gang members. ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC) in Vermont is playing a critical role in this effort. The center is running MS-13 gang member data provided by state and local law enforcement agencies through various ICE and Homeland Security databases to help these agencies identify and locate violent gang members.

"At ICE, we recognize that no single law enforcement agency can win the fight against transnational street gangs....ICE has a long history of working with our partners in law enforcement to leverage our law enforcement abilities. Operation Community Shield is no exception," Garcia said.

Garcia noted that ICE and the Bureau of Prisons have also launched a joint effort to identify MS-13 gang members in federal prisons. Through records cross-checks at the LESC, ICE and the Bureau of Prison have successfully identified 102 MS-13 gang member records in the federal prison database. Both agencies are working to identify those who may be directing criminal activity from jail and are prioritizing for deportation gang members that are completing their prison sentences.

Operation Community Shield also has an important international element, Garcia added. ICE maintains close working relationships with the governments of Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala in the exchange of intelligence pertaining to MS-13 and other gang activity. ICE works through its Attaché offices overseas to cooperate with these governments and others that are also experiencing gang problems in their nations.

"Ensuring public safety is among the most important homeland security missions of ICE. Gang enforcement is a crucial part of that mission," Garcia told lawmakers.

Assistant Secretary Garcia's testimony is posted on the Web at www.ice.gov.

A city-by-city breakdown of the MS-13 arrests by ICE agents under Operation Community Shield is featured below. Operation Community Shield is an ongoing activity and arrests are occurring continually.

Operation Community Shield Arrests by City

Amarillo	1
Baltimore	14
Boston	2
Brownsville, TX	1
Charlotte	3
Dallas	4
Indianapolis	1
Los Angeles	17
Long Island	23
McAllen, TX	1
Miami	15
Newark	9
Orange County	1
Phoenix	1
Providence	1
San Antonio	2
San Bernardino	2
San Francisco	12
Washington, D.C.	45

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.